

**Testimony of**  
**VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA**

**presented by**

**Patrick G. Eddington**  
**Associate Director of Government Relations**

**Before the**

**Subcommittee on Benefits**

**House Veterans Affairs Committee**

**Regarding**

**H.R. 3173, H.R. 3735, H.R. 3771, H.R. 4042, and related bills**

**June 11, 2002**

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Reyes, and other distinguished members of the subcommittee, Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is pleased to have this opportunity to provide testimony on a number of bills of interest to our membership. Let me address each bill in turn.

**H.R. 3173, the Servicemembers and Military Families Financial Protection Act of 2001**

Our understanding is that this bill would:

- Provide for an increase in the maximum monthly lease amount for protections under the Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act of 1940, and
- Provide authority for optional increase in maximum coverage under Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance and Veterans' Group Life Insurance

VVA is pleased to endorse both measures. During this time of war, it is imperative that the federal government ensure that Guard and Reserve members called to active duty have their homes and their livelihoods protected even as they protect us from our terrorist enemies. If we hope to recruit and retain the best citizen-soldier all-volunteer force, we must demonstrate as a society that we will do all in our power to protect the financial interests of our Guard and Reserve members. VVA urges the committee to favorably report out this bill to the full committee.

**H.R. 3735, Department of Veterans Affairs Overpayment Administration Improvement Act of 2002**

Our understanding is that this bill would amend title 38, United States Code, to extend the time for the application for a waiver of recovery of claims of overpayments of veterans benefits, and to otherwise improve the administration of overpayments of veterans benefits.

We agree that the VA should be in the position to recover overpayments when they occur. However, VVA has heard from veterans in the past about VA overpayment collection practices that were overzealous and heavy-handed, even when the overpayment was due to mistakes by the VA. H.R. 3735 would help even the playing field by giving the Secretary the option to waive recovery of minimal overpayments to veterans, a common sense approach that VVA wholeheartedly endorses.

**H.R. 3771**

Our reading of this measure indicates that it would amend title 38, United States Code, to provide that monetary benefits paid to veterans by States and municipalities shall be excluded

from consideration as income for purposes of pension benefits paid by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

VVA has long argued that all limits on additional monies payable to VA pensioners should be lifted, and VVA is delighted to fully endorse this measure. We hope the subcommittee will swiftly and favorably report out this bill to the full committee.

#### **H.R. 4042, Veterans Home Loan Prepayment Protection Act of 2002**

This bill would prohibit the levying of additional daily interest charges following prepayment in full of housing loans guaranteed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Mr. Chairman, this bill would help to end a practice that VVA considers a form of loan sharking by unscrupulous lenders. We applaud the subcommittee for moving to protect veteran home owners from this practice, and we urge the subcommittee to favorably report out this bill to the full committee.

#### **Arlington National Cemetery Burial Eligibility Act**

Our understanding is that this bill would further codify and refine the eligibility criteria for burial at Arlington National Cemetery. VVA testified last year on this topic, giving our unqualified support to H.R. 3423, offered by Chairman Smith. We support this draft bill for exactly the same reasons.

The Arlington National Cemetery Burial Eligibility Act is partly a response to the tragedy that affected the family of Captain Charles Burlingame (the pilot of flight 77 which crashed into the Pentagon on September 11<sup>th</sup>) from receiving full burial rights at Arlington. We concur fully with Chairman Smith's view that reservists like Captain Burlingame who die as a result of enemy action should be accorded burial at Arlington, if that is their choice or the choice of their survivors.

While we understand that this bill only addresses Arlington, we would like to take this opportunity to reiterate to the subcommittee our view that the VA must consider creating a new national cemetery in the city of Washington. We are aware that there are unused tracks of land in need of redevelopment within the District, including space near the Battleground National Cemetery in Washington, D.C.. Turning this unused or underutilized spaces into one or more appropriately landscaped and maintained national cemeteries would create new national shrines to provide final homes for our honored dead.

Outside of the national capitol region, we would respectfully suggest that sites identified as excess by the Base Closure and Realignment Commission be evaluated for their suitability for conversion to national cemeteries. We understand that Congress often prefers to see such excess property sold to private developers as a way of enhancing revenues. However, given the expected increase in veteran burials over the next 15 years, we believe each facility slated for

closure under BRAC should be carefully evaluated for its suitability for conversion to a national cemetery.

### **Spousal Dependency and Indemnity Compensation**

This bill would provide for payment by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs of dependency and indemnity compensation to the surviving spouse of a deceased veteran who for at least one year preceeding death had a service-connected disability rated totally disabling that was due to a service-connected cold-weather injury.

VVA is happy to lend our full support to this legislation, Mr. Chairman. However, we are curious as to the rationale for only including claims involving veterans with cold-weather injuries. Surely other service-connected conditions should be treated in the same fashion. We hope the subcommittee will modify the language of the bill to allow for the inclusion of all service-connected conditions, and subsequently favorably report out this bill to the full committee.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my written statement. On behalf of our national president, Tom Corey, please accept my thanks for allowing VVA the opportunity to share our views on these very important legislative measures.

**VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA**  
**Funding Statement**  
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Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is a national non-profit veterans membership organization registered as a 501(c)(19) with the Internal Revenue Service. VVA is also appropriately registered with the Secretary of the Senate and the Clerk of the House of Representatives in compliance with the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995.

VVA is not currently in receipt of any federal grant or contract, other than the routine allocation of office space and associated resources in VA Regional Offices for outreach and direct services through its Veterans Benefits Program (Service Representatives). This is also true of the previous two fiscal years.

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**Patrick G. Eddington**

Patrick G. Eddington was an award-winning military imagery analyst at the CIA's National Photographic Interpretation Center for almost nine years. He received numerous accolades for his analytical work, including letters of commendation from the Joint Special Operations Command, the Joint Warfare Analysis Center and the CIA's Office of Military Affairs.

During his tenure at CIA, Eddington worked a wide range of intelligence issues. His analytical assignments included monitoring the break-up of the former Soviet Union; providing military assessments to policy makers on Iraqi and Iranian conventional forces; and coordinating the CIA's military targeting support to NATO during Operation Deliberate Force in Bosnia in 1995.

Eddington received his undergraduate degree in International Affairs from Southwest Missouri State University in 1985. While at the CIA, Eddington took a one-year sabbatical to attend Georgetown University, earning a master's degree in National Security Studies. Eddington spent eleven years in the U.S. Army Reserve and the National Guard in both enlisted and commissioned service.

Currently, Eddington serves as Associate Director of Government Relations for Vietnam Veterans of America. Eddington's opinion pieces have appeared in a number of publications, including the *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Times*, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, and the *Army Times*, among others. Eddington is a frequent commentator on national security issues for the Fox News Channel, MSNBC, SKYNews, CNN, and other domestic and international television networks. His first book, *Gassed in the Gulf*, was featured on the September 20, 1997 edition of CSPAN's "About Books" program.

Eddington is a member of the Authors Guild and Amnesty International. He also serves on the board of directors of the James Madison Project, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit advocacy organization focusing on 1st Amendment issues as they relate to national defense, foreign affairs, intelligence, and veterans policy. He and his wife Robin live in Alexandria, Virginia.